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ABSTRACT

Although residential experiences in outdoor education have gone through many changes and refinements over the years, the basic concept remains unchanged--to provide school children with both outdoor activities and group living opportunities. In the 1930's, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation developed a camping program in the Battle Creek (Michigan) Public Schools and established several year-round camps, including one offering remedial services for handicapped children. In 1946 Edwin Pumala implemented the San Diego City-County Camping Program which emphasized conservation learning. Today various outdoor learning experiences are provided by national parks, Department of Environmental Conservation centers and camps, college facilities, public and private nature centers, and community nature trails and parks. The Geneva Public Schools (New York) provide a 2-3 week program for 2.5 days and participate in a strand-type curriculum with a central core of forestry. However, like many schools, the program is beginning to experience a "budget crunch," and the solution is not easily defined. Outdoor education has come a long way in the past half century but is now standing at a crossroad. Nine general and 13 specific objectives for a residential outdoor education program are listed. NQA)

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Outdoor Education Residential Programs:

"Where We've Been-Where We Are-Where We're Going"

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The following is the text of a presentation made at a workshop session of the New York State Outdoor Education Association at S.U.N.Y. Buffalo on October 9, 1982.

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Outdoor Education Residential Programs:

"Where We've Been-Where We Are-Where We're Going"

Although residential experiences in outdoor education have gone through many changes and refinements over the years, the basic concept remains unchanged. We want to provide school children with both outdoor activities and group living opportunities. The purpose of such a program is for students to develop an appreciation and understanding of the world around them, and to experience the people (fellow students) who live in it. Perhaps in the long run the latter experience will have the most value to the individuals as they go through life.

I would like to list for you a set of general and specific objectives for a residential outdoor education program. I don't wish to imply that these are the final word in objectives, but they have served me well in conveying to teachers, boards of education and administrators the thought behind such programs.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

A. To encourage the use of the natural environment as an extension of the regular classroom.

B. To integrate academic disciplines and individual in an outdoor setting using environmental materials.

C. To provide an opportunity for a group living experience, together and apart from daily routine and in a new environment.

D. To develop a better understanding of the natural environment and the interrelationships that exist among its constituents.

E. To provide a setting and learning experience therein that will help build favorable attitudes and perhaps change others relative to conservation of our resources.

F. To allow ample opportunity for individual participation and achievement in outdoor learning and recreational activities.

G. To offer leadership training to participating teachers which will ultimately result in greater use of the out-of-doors as an educational facility immediately available to all.

H. To present materials and techniques that are useful and necessary in order to plan and execute outdoor educational experiences.

I. To depart from the normal printed book or lecture method of learning and emphasize learning by inquiry, exploration and discovery.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To develop within a school system an outdoor education program for students that will involve overnight excursions to appropriate outdoor study areas (i.e.; nature center, environmental education center)
2. To familiarize teachers with the educational and recreational program possibilities that exist in a natural study area and that are enhanced by a longer visit than the traditional short (less and 1/2 day) visit.
3. To enable teachers, students and administrative personnel to cooperatively plan and execute an overnight outdoor education excursion to an established center.

4. To develop program plans and activities that will appeal to a wide range of interests and thus allow for maximum participation by every student.
5. To plan experiences that will involve simultaneously as many senses as possible. Seeing, feeling, smelling, tasting and hearing will become essential in outdoor learning activities.
6. To share responsibilities in the maintenance of the living quarters, purchase and preparation of food, packing and unpacking materials and supplies and in the respectable treatment of the natural environment.
7. To give teachers (as well as the resident staff) equal responsibility for the education of the children while on the trip. Resulting from their participation, teachers will be less inhibited and feel better prepared to independently conduct outdoor learning activities after returning to their own schools.
8. To familiarize the participants with the ecology and the major ecological relationships that exist among the living and non-living constituents of the environment and provide opportunities for close and careful study during supervised learning periods. Equipment use, collection and handling of specimens are important activities.
9. To emphasize conservation of resources and man's influence on and responsibility for the natural resources.
10. To stimulate strong local interest on the part of teachers, students, administrators and parents in outdoor education programs and activities, hopefully leading to the identification, development and extensive use of local outdoor areas for educational purposes.
11. To collect and prepare a variety of materials that can be used (upon return to the classroom) to continue studies initiated during the outdoor experience.
12. To include, whenever appropriate, school personnel as well as parents in the total experience.
13. To eventually include outdoor education programs as part of the regular curriculum.

Now, with the objectives set before us, we can address the historic role that outdoor education has played in our public school systems.

There are a variety of programs that function under the very general heading of outdoor education. They run the gamet from school planned/school directed/school taught programs utilizing either school owned and managed facilities or centers operated by community groups, government departments, or private agencies (i.e.; Salvation Army, YMCA, Boy or Girl Scouts, etc.), to programs completely removed from the school administration. The latter program can best be described as a service provided for a fee. The majority of school outdoor education programs fall most frequently in the range between these two extremes.

The exact date of the beginnings of residential programs in this country is unknown, but in the early 1930's in Battle Creek, Michigan, there existed the W.K. Kellogg Foundation whose activities were "... dedicated to improving the health, education, and well being of children and youth." The founder of the group asked the Board of Trustees: "Aren't we going to have a camping program for children?" The board responded by developing a camping program in the Battle Creek Public Schools. It also established several year 'round camps, including one offering remedial services for handicapped children. These programs are thriving in Battle Creek, as are those begun by the American Camping Association and the Time-Life camps in the East.

In 1946 Edwin Pumala was selected to impliment the San Diego City-County Camping Program. The emphasis was on conservation

learning, not just recreation. The several camps within the county are described as "schools for citizenship."

Denver Fox joined the staff as principal of the first school camp, and as the program grew, became the administrator of all camps. The camps were originally an old C.C.C. facility, a Y.M.C.A. camp, and a private camp, all acquired by the school district. Since its inception, the program has served over 250,000 children in a refined outdoor instructional program.

Today's programs are equally effective in meeting the needs of this generation of students. Throughout New York State are private and public facilities capable of providing a variety of outdoor learning experiences. On Long Island there are five nature centers and two National Park areas serving the population. Upstate has a variety of Department of Environmental Conservation centers and camps, college facilities, public and private nature centers, and community nature trails and parks.

Nor are we in New York in any way out in front of our neighboring states. Pennsylvania has the Pocono Environmental Education Center in the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. P.E.E.C. is operated by Keystone Junior College and serves as a teaching center for future conservation educators as well as a learning area for youngsters.

New Jersey has the School of Conservation in Sussex and many nature centers throughout the state. Several school districts have utilized National Park facilities in the Delaware Valley to conduct school operated camps.

My own school district, the Geneva Public Schools, utilizes

the residential facilities of the Rogers Environmental Education Center at Sherburne, N.Y. The Rogers Center was developed by the state D.E.C. on property willed to it that had formerly been a pheasant farm. Under the leadership of John Weeks, the first director, and the late Herm Weiskotten, the first conservation educator, the Rogers Center became a reality by 1970. It consists of 640 acres on the main property, with a modern dormitory, contemporary education building, support facilities, and numerous outdoor program areas.

As director of outdoor studies for Geneva, I conduct a 2-3 week program at Rogers for all the Sixth Graders from the Geneva Public Schools. The students attend for 2 1/2 days in groups of approximately 45. They travel 110 miles by school bus to the center every Monday and Wednesday. This schedule provides 2 nights and 2 1/2 days on-site experience.

Working in groups of 10-12, the youngsters participate in a strand-type curriculum with a central core of forestry. The activity units include maps and compasses, making and using a biltmore stick, principles of forestry, and pond life study. This latter unit is conducted by the center naturalists utilizing the center's fully equipped laboratory and the abundant plant and animal life of the ponds and marsh. A culminating activity is conducted in a hardwood forest where the students, working in small groups, assess the needs for good forest management practices.

Evening activities consist of game-oriented learning activitites designed to develop understanding of and responsibility for the natural environment. After dark, a recreational game of

capture-the-flag or a campfire program with songs and skits climaxes the day.

Food services are a most important part of Geneva's program. We engage the service of a professional cook to insure top quality meals. This includes three meals daily, two lemonade or fruit drink breaks in the mornings and afternoons, and a bedtime snack. Food and dairy products are obtained through the school food services or by local purchase.

Living together in a dormitory setting with others is an exceptional learning experience for our students. An orientation is conducted upon arrival to encourage each dorm (boys and girls) to consider what rights each individual must have and what responsibilities each must observe. Because the groups consist of students from a variety of backgrounds and school classes, new friends are made and a real sharing begins to emerge. Housekeeping is a group responsibility and includes kitchen cleanup, dining room cleanup, lavatory and dormitory cleaning, usually after each meal.

Each group selects a group leader who keeps a group clipboard of names, schedules, and locations, and generally keeps the group together. They also choose a group photographer, who, using a school camera, makes a pictoral record of the groups' experiences. Every student takes a turn as a waiter at their table, setting the table, serving the meal, and clearing the table.

The entire program is staffed by teacher volunteers from the school district. Each session has four teachers on staff, a director, an associate director who is also a registered nurse,

the cook and her husband, and two juniors or seniors from the high school who are considering a career in conservation education.

The teachers come from a real cross-section of the district faculty. They may be from grades 2 to 6, and from such subject areas as music, industrial arts, science, biology, language arts, and social studies. Each is selected on the basis of willingness to serve, interst, and strengths in subject areas.

The students' cost is $28 each for the program. This includes their dormitory fee, meals, and a t-shirt with the outdoor studies logo. These funds are earned by the students the previous fall when the sixth grade conducts a money-earning project.

The school district pays the costs of educational supplies, transportation, teacher salaries and substitute pay during teachers participation. An informational booklet is sent to parents well in advance informing them of the program and an informational parents' night is held to show films of the program and answer questions.

Like many schools in our state, and indeed in our nation, we are beginning to experience a "budget crunch." Reductions in state and federal aid, coupled with rising costs, have forced school districts to examine their priorities regarding programs and the over-all effect to the total curriculum. It is not an optomistic picture.

Concurrently, nature centers that depended on grants and other sources of funding are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain an adequate budget. This is especially apparent in centers operated by government agencies.

The solution, to both schools and nature centers, is not easily defined. There are choices. Closing a center or ending a program is one alternative. Reducing services and program content is another. A third possibility is to maintain and perhaps expand the current programs by finding new sources of funding, increasing revenue and user fees, and "bare-bone-cost-cutting" of any areas that will not affect program quality.

Outdoor education has come a long way in the past half century and I'm sure it will continue. But we must not delude ourselves. We are standing at a crossroads. We must make a choice. Certainly, there now exists an adequate number of well-trained outdoor educators and administrators who can be depended upon to set the right course. The future of outdoor education is now in their very capable hands.

- Don F. Mitchinson
- Director, Geneva Schools Outdoor Studies

Copies of the Geneva Public Schools Outdoor Studies Booklet and the Curriculum Guide are available to schools and educational institutions. Address inquiries to:

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